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ABSTRACT

State child welfare systems need to invest significant resources developing training programs that build knowledge and skill levels of the child welfare workforce. Often these training programs have produced only limited results, perhaps because the training is not linked directly to the knowledge and skills necessary to perform complex human services tasks. New York sought to improve its training effectiveness by developing an outcome-based child protective curriculum derived from knowledge and skill competencies articulated by its child welfare supervisory and managerial workforce. This movement to an outcome-based curriculum necessitated a major shift in evaluation strategy from testing group learning to testing individual performance. This paper addresses this shift and discusses an embedded evaluation strategy that supports New York's outcome-based training and individual performance measures of skill and knowledge prior to, during, and after training. The focus of the discussion is on training and employment consequences. The evaluation will include knowledge testing, attitude testing, and skills testing. Some potential problems with the design are outlined. (Contains 8 tables and 13 references.) (SLD)

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Abstract

Child protective workers frequently enter their careers with little relevant training and experience regardless of their educational backgrounds. Therefore state child welfare systems need to invest significant resources developing training programs that build knowledge and skill levels of its child welfare workforce. Often these training programs have produced limited results. Some speculate that these limited results are due to training not being directly linked to the knowledge and skills necessary to perform complex human services tasks. New York sought to improve its training effectiveness by developing an outcome based child protective curriculum derived from knowledge and skill competencies articulated by its child welfare supervisory and managerial workforce. *This movement to an outcome-based curriculum necessitated a major shift in evaluation strategy from testing group learning to testing individual performance.* This paper addresses this shift and discusses an embedded evaluation strategy that supports New York's outcome based training, and individual performance measures of skill and knowledge prior to, during and post training. *Training and employment consequences will be an important part of this discussion.*

Introduction

New York State has been a leader in the utilization of federal and state training funding and resources. Primarily through its university-based training system, the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) spends over 30 million dollars per year training its child welfare workforce. Federal Titles XX and IV-E of the Social Security Act contributes the bulk of these funds, with State University cost sharing, and direct state appropriations making up the remainder.

In the early 1990, state officials became concerned that even with this massive influx of training funds, its child welfare workforce remained largely unskilled in accomplishing it overall child welfare goals of child safety, family preservation, independent living, adoption, and child development. Findings from a study of New York's child welfare and child protective curriculum used throughout the 1980s and the 1990s gave significant credence to this concern. The study found New York's 10-day child protective services training to be a knowledge based, agency-focussed, lecture driven curriculum with few skills building objectives or opportunities for practicing skills. The majority of learning objectives (77.3%) were knowledge based, while only 15.6% of the learning objectives were devoted to performance or skill development. Of these skill-based objectives only 5% were matched with an appropriate level of learning in the curriculum activity. Even with the majority knowledge-based objectives, only 13.1% of them had appropriate corresponding curriculum activities that could reasonably assist the participant in achieving the learning goal. In no case did the skill-based objectives have an evaluation strategy that measured whether the participant could perform the articulated skill to any degree. It came as no surprise that the study noted a lack of modeling by trainers, few opportunities to practice skills, and little individual feedback. One additional finding was significant, that the current training addressed local agency needs rather than the needs of families and children (Child Welfare Institute, 1996a).

Clearly New York needed to synchronize its child welfare goals and caseworker performance expectations with its training strategies and curriculum.

In 1995 and 1996, OCFS, together with local district supervisors and managers, began the process of re-vitalizing its child welfare training system. Since New York State government officials only supervise child welfare programs statewide while local districts or counties administer the day-to-day programs, any basic change must take into consideration the practices and policies of 62 local jurisdictions. The need for local district input is essential in New York State if any real change is going to occur. The process of re-vitalization began by calling together a representative group of local district child welfare supervisors and managers. Their task was to identify caseworker abilities that were congruent with achieving the five overall child welfare outcomes of child safety, family preservation, adoption, youth development and independent living, *and* within the social work oriented interpersonal helping skills of empathy, genuineness, and respect. Over a two-year period, a hierarchy of over 900 core and enabling abilities were identified, categorized and approved. These core and enabling abilities defined the specific human performance capabilities needed by casework staff in order to fulfill the five overall child welfare outcomes (Child Welfare Institute, 1996b). The development and construction of the core abilities was modeled on the work of (Gagne, 1985; Gagne, Briggs, & Wager, 1992; Gagne & Medsker, 1996). To a large degree, the abilities refer to a caseworker's ability to make informed, knowledgeable decisions that ensure the safety and development of children, as well as the preservation of families. Examples of caseworker abilities can be found in Table 1.

These caseworker core competencies and enabling abilities formed the basis for a series of training strategies and curriculums that now govern all of New York's child welfare training. The training, all of it ability and skill based, covers a 20-day common core or basic training for new caseworkers, a shorter basic course for re-mediating and up-

dating existing caseworker skills, and a series of 5-day specialized courses that conform to New York's overall child welfare goals. Courses for existing and new supervisors are offered to support the caseworker abilities for all levels of child welfare casework staff. Table 2 outlines the levels of training, as well as the topics, skills, and training length anticipated under the new child welfare training design.

Complementing this shift to outcome and individual performance-based training is a shift in evaluation expectations. State and local districts requested an evaluation and feedback protocol designed to assess an individual caseworker's performance in training (Child Welfare Institute, 1996c). Individual caseworker performance assessments would assist supervisors in 1) the placement of new staff within a child welfare agency, and 2) the retention or dismissal of new staff during their civil service probation period. Any developed protocol must co-exist within the confines of New York's current civil service law and regulation in regard to due process, and record keeping. For example, any information gathered and discussed about a participant at any time in this protocol and process necessarily will become part of the employee's personnel record and may be used in an employment hearing or a legal action at a later date. Moving beyond an evaluation strategy that only addresses group learning and group satisfaction with training to a strategy that measures individual participant performance within the training and supervisory arena is a major undertaking.

An evaluation strategy

An evaluation protocol of any outcome-based training is limited to measuring the performance of training participants within the training environment. Specifically this evaluation protocol is designed to measure a participant's capacity to obtain relevant information from children, families and collateral sources, and to make decisions

regarding safety and risk, removals, determinations, and case plans. These information tasks and the subsequent decisions must be accomplished within social work oriented practice standards, and a citizen's due process rights for civil proceedings.

An outcome-based competency driven training program must have more than one evaluation and testing strategy to monitor the knowledge, attitudes and skills that makes up this performance. Additionally, shifting the evaluation strategy from group-learning, training focused strategy to a participant learning, outcome and ability driven evaluation, demands additional rigor in three major areas: instrument development, evaluation administration, and record keeping. It also demands a communication and feedback system among the trainer, the participant and the supervisor.

Knowledge based testing: Although there are a variety of knowledge-based tests, the most efficient, and reliable knowledge based assessment strategy is a multiple-choice test based on the abilities *and* training activities identified in a curriculum. With any new or revised curriculum, test items have to be developed from the existing item banks, assessed for validity and reliability by trainers, curriculum developers and reviewers, as well as content experts in the field of child protective services. Since the evaluation strategy has shifted from measuring group learning to measuring individual performance, the structure, process and the outcome of the testing design is more vulnerable to civil, employment or criminal court scrutiny. For example, a participant could argue that the reason for termination of employment was due, in part, to an individual and "embedded" testing procedure that did not conform to strict protocols. To account for this possibility, the design and development of the test items, as well as the testing environment within any outcome-based training has to be modified to ensure a more rigorous test integrity. Particular focus needs to be paid to designing a testing environment that ensures test item security, and designing test scoring, recording and record keeping strategies, as well as test reporting procedures that

ensure accuracy and individual confidentiality standards. Scholastic Aptitude Test or Civil Services testing procedures are appropriate models.

Attitude testing: The outcome-based CPI curriculum contains a number of attitudinal abilities that address participant feelings, reactions, empathy, reflection, responses to emotional needs, and resistance. These fundamental attitudinal domains and responses form the basis for the interpersonal helping skills of respect, genuineness and empathy. Measuring these attitudinal domains may provide an opportunity to assess whether participants have any attitudinal impediments to utilizing the knowledge and skills taught. Yet, measuring these individual attitudinal dimensions as defined by the curriculum will be a difficult task, and stretch limited resources. This task should be addressed only after there is some confidence in both the new knowledge and skills based tests. Process measures such as participant attitudes toward the training can be measured relatively easily with Likert based items. Participants can easily rate trainer performance, supervisor performance, training activity relevance and quality. More difficult will be addressing questions of participant perception of organizational and supervisory support for training received during the initial stages of a participant's career on things like job performance, retention and satisfaction. This might be valuable information to provide to trainers, curriculum developers, and directors of services on the local district level.

Skills testing: Skills testing is the third leg of this evaluation. Skills learned in skills-based training are best evaluated in the training, as well as, back on the job site. Within this model, trainers (or separate evaluators) rate the participant's skills performance within a training condition utilizing an agreed upon instrument and rating scale. Skill and tasks measured are based on the tasks and skills clearly articulated in all training activities, material and readings. This strategy demands that the tasks and skills are presented to participants consistently and clearly, that participants have the time and

opportunity to practice, that trainers have the time to assess and correct practiced skills immediately, and that participants again have the opportunity to re-practice the corrected skill. Additional opportunities should be made for the participant to demonstrate the learned skill again in a different but related manner, and for the trainer again to assess attainment to the skill, and to provide corrective feedback, if necessary. Supervisors need access to the same evaluation and corrective feedback system to ensure that the participant maintains the ability. The literature conforms to our training, research and evaluation experience with *Therapeutic Crisis Intervention* and *What Kids Can Tell Us* (Nunno, Holden, & Leidy, in press; (Warren et al., 1999). These programs have shown that individuals who learn new skills and maintain them through time are more successful when they go through a process of over-training, practice, and immediate correction within training. Back at the work site, utilization of new skills is no guarantee of maintenance. Maintenance demands supervisory coaching with corrective feedback, and organizational support through policy and procedure (Carmel & Hunter, 1990).

There are major consequences of this type of training and evaluation system. Evaluation and training literature indicates that learning skills with an embedded evaluation and corrective feedback system requires a lengthy and sophisticated process. One model of interview training described by (Kohnken, 1998) outlines an eight phase process from mental preparation to remedial role plays to ensure that the skill is initially learned correctly. Other research in Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation training (Brennan, Braslow, Batcheller, & Kaye, 1996; Moser & Coleman, 1992) shows that soon after training, skills must be practiced, reviewed by experts for error, corrected and reviewed again (and corrected if necessary) if the skill is to be maintained at an expected level. Practice prior to assessment or evaluation, and/or after hours practice is necessary in order to provide the participant with a fair chance of attaining some level

of competence. For the trainer to monitor practice, offer corrective feedback and assess properly, 8 participants per trainer is the limit. Periodic monitoring of rater reliability is essential to ensure assessment and evaluation consistency (See Tables 3,4,5 & 6). As stated earlier, this embedded evaluation has to meet or exceed employment related testing standards for potential civil or criminal court actions.

Post training evaluation report: An essential component of an individual performance training assessment protocol is a participant evaluation report. Minimum requirements to meet civil service procedure, and employment due process standards would necessitate:

• certification that the participant attended all required sessions;

• certification that the trainee participated in all the sessions and activities required, and at the level proscribed;

• scores representing individual trainee knowledge based test scores, group mean and trainee's score in relationship to that mean;

• scores representing individual trainee's attitudinal measures, group mean and trainee's score in relationship to that mean; and,

• scores representing individual trainee's skills measures, a group mean and the individual's score in relationship to that mean.

Any other comments thought necessary by the training, and or evaluation staff to complete the assessment of the trainee. (See Tables 7 & 8)

Resources necessary to support this evaluation protocol

A variety of direct and indirect resources are necessary to support this protocol. For the purposes of this paper, three resource categories will be discussed briefly, the evaluation instruments, the trainers, and the training environment.

Instruments: Direct evaluation resources include sophisticated hardware for telephone conferences, updated software applications for trainee profiles, pre, mid and post conference instruments and tools, a large statewide pool of updated knowledge multiple choice items tied to abilities, more sophisticated Likert and open-ended instruments for local district personnel and trainers to assess skills, and instruments for assessing case decision-making. Not all of these instruments (especially the skills assessment instruments) can be developed quickly since testing, re-development and re-testing are time-consuming activities. Priority must be given to evaluation instruments that can be developed and tested quickly. Longer term development strategies for additional instruments that assess, for example, case decision-making can be initiated at a later date.

Training staff: It is necessary to calculate the indirect resource costs of assessing participants under this protocol. The impact on trainers and supervisors is not to be ignored. With skills training and with embedded evaluation, the relationship between the trainer and the participant changes from "expert dispensing knowledge" to "coach assisting skill development". There is little in the literature to document this change but discussions with trainers who have had to make this transition indicates that the adjustment is real. Transfer of training to skill development requires a re-orientation (Curry, Kaplan, & Knuppel, 1994). Specifically, all involved in this process (including the evaluators) need training in teaching and assessing ability levels with instruments that strive for objective measures. Comprehensive training in the use of these instruments

will reduce the variability in scores, and therefore increase the reliability of the assessment process. This evaluation protocol will also affect the number of trainers assigned to each course offering. Fairness dictates that if a trainer is expected to be an integral part of an assessment process that has the potential to determine whether a participant is retained by a local district after their probation period, then each trainer must be limited to assessing eight participants per training program. Other more expensive and extensive strategies might include employing evaluation specialists who can focus entirely on participant assessment, independent of training.

Training environment: This evaluation protocol will demand that more attention is given to the training and testing environment. Currently, training and testing occur in the same environment, usually in a hotel or motel complex along one of New York's major highways. Any caseworker training, assessment, and evaluation system which has legal and employment consequences for the participant must give more attention to a supportive and positive environment. Perhaps training and evaluation needs to shift to a more permanent and controlled environment conducive to more traditional notions of learning and testing.

A Summary of the Potential Problems with the Design

There are a number of potential problems with this design that will be difficult for the current child welfare training contractors, local districts and OCFS to address. The problems can be summarized as follows.

- The design is complex, lengthy, and time-consuming for participants, supervisors and training staff.

- The design demands a high level of care and control over the testing environment.

• The training content, the training design, and the trainers will have to shift from a knowledge driven expert-based training to a skills driven coaching-based training program with necessary and strong ties to local district supervisors.

• An individual's training performance may have a direct consequence on their employment. Participants need to be informed.

• There is no remediation provision prior to CPI training for a participant who does not perform up to an accepted standard, who lacks motivation or who does not co-operate in the Common Core program.

• Local supervisors will have to re-train, evaluate, and correct skills if participant skills are to be maintained after training. Even highly skilled people who learn new skills and utilize them daily lose proficiency in those new skills unless they are evaluated and corrected periodically. It is the human condition and not a reflection of the individual's capacity, the quality of supervision, or the quality of training.

• The design will take up to three years to design, pilot, redesign and fully implement.

Tables and Figures

Table 1: Sample of caseworker abilities defined in the Child Protective Investigation course

Section IV Determining allegation validity and safety

Initiating the investigation with the family

IV-A-1 Obtain relevant information through direct interviews with a family

- Engage family members in the collection of evidence
- Collect information necessary to determine an allegation

Determining that an indicator is the result of maltreatment and caretaker is responsible

IV-A-2 Determine if an indicator is the result of maltreatment

- Determine the presence of impairment or danger of impairment
- Recognize situations indicating a failure to exercise a minimum degree of care

Indicating or unfounding the allegation

IV-A-3 Determine whether a caretaker has been responsible for the maltreatment of a child

- Apply the credible evidence standard to the determination of an allegation

Making a final determination of safety

IV-A-4 Complete a final safety determination

- Apply information about present and emerging danger to a final safety determination

Documenting the determination and safety decision

IV-A-5 Document a final allegation and safety determination

- Document the final decision indicating or unfounding the allegation
- Document the final safety determination
- Complete the risk profile (1st time mentioned)

Table 2: Child Welfare Training Levels

Training level and existing University responsible	Topics/skills	Training Length
Common CORE **On-the-job-training** SUC-BUFFALO	Basic knowledge and skills essential for the new child welfare worker	20 days
Specialized - Outcome focused training		
Cornell - Child Protective Investigations SUNY-Albany - Permanency / Independent Living	a. CPI - Specialized knowledge and skills essential for the new child protective worker b. Prevention -Specialized knowledge and skills essential for the new prevention worker c. Adoptions -Specialized knowledge and skills essential for the new adoption worker d. Permanency / Independent Living - Specialized knowledge and skills essential for the new foster care worker e. Family Preservation - Specialized knowledge and skills essential for the new family Preservation worker	5 days
Advanced COMMON CORE skills (SKILL BASED TRAINING)	a. Testifying b. Interviewing young children c. Family assessments	1 to 3 days
Special Population training (KNOWLEDGE BASED TRAINING)	a. Domestic Violence Training b. Drug Abusing Families c. Sexual Abusing Families	1 to 3 days
Partners Training	Multi-disciplinary teams	1 to 3 days

Table 3: Steps in the process of development / revision of knowledge based multiple choice test items.

- agreement on abilities, abilities and training activities to be tested with knowledge based - multiple choice items
- agreement on abilities, abilities and training activities to be reported within the post training conference with knowledge based - multiple choice items
- development of three draft items per ability written by trainer, curriculum developer and evaluator
- items modified and edited by evaluator according to agreed upon criteria
- Review (Content Analysis) by trainer, curriculum developer and "experts"
- Item testing for reliability and validity
- modification / deletion of item
- submission to item bank

Table 4: Steps to develop knowledge based testing procedure

- design testing environment, test administration and test monitoring procedures that ensure test security
- design test scoring, recording and record keeping strategies that ensure accuracy and individual confidentiality standards
- design test reporting procedures that ensure accuracy and ensure individual confidentiality standards

Table 5: Steps to develop skill based assessment, monitoring and corrective feedback

- agreement on skill based abilities and training activities to be tested
- agreement on skill-based abilities and training activities to be reported within the post training conference with skill review ratings
- development of at draft rating system written by trainer, curriculum developer and evaluator
- items modified and edited by evaluator according to agreed upon criteria
- review (Content Analysis) by trainer, curriculum developer and "experts" to assess validity of item
- testing for rater reliability
- modification of rating scales
- continued testing / re-testing and corrective feedback on skills and rating scale

Table 6: Steps to develop skill based testing procedure

- design training activities that provide for practice and corrective feedback
- design skill rating activity and environment, skill rating administration and monitoring procedures that ensure test security and reliability
- design skill rating scoring, recording and record keeping strategies that ensure accuracy and individual confidentiality standards
- design skill rating reporting procedures that ensure accuracy and ensure individual confidentiality standards

Table 7: Suggested Avenues, Elements and Time frames for a Local District, Trainer and Participant Evaluation Protocol for CORE training.

Avenue	Elements gathered and supplied by trainers	Elements gathered and supplied by local district supervisors or staff development	Communication vehicle (s)	Time frame
Pre Training Conference		• Demographics • Measured performance on KAS pre training testing instrument, previous training or OJT • Preparation of individual for training performance or training contract • Special Needs	•STARS system • Developmental *Needs Summary* • Trainee Profile	Prior to training
Mid-CORE conference	• Participation / deportment in training • Assessment of IHS via videotape • red flags • Performance/ training contract measurement assessment • conflicting expectations • emerging needs	• Conflicting training expectations • Emerging needs • Application of learning and skills in week 1 and 2 • Progress in on-the-job training or "homework" • Perception of training	• Telephone conference initiated by trainer and with the local staff development supervisor, coach and/or the line supervisor and the training participant. • Mid-CORE assessment tools • Update of the *Developmental Needs Summary*	Between weeks 2 and 3

Post CORE conference	• Growth or progress in relation to training or learning contract • remaining needs • Assessment: • decision-making quality • use of case tools • red flags • Additional assistance to help trainee through OJT or remediation	• Growth or progress in relation to training or learning contract • areas of CORE where trainee is doing well or not so well • Additional assistance to help trainee through remediation or OJT • How the training went for the participant	• Telephone conference initiated by trainer and with the local staff development supervisor, coach and/or the line supervisor and the training participant. • KAS assessment tools • Update of the *Developmental Needs Summary*	Within two weeks after training

Avenue	**Elements gathered and supplied by trainers**	**Elements gathered and supplied by local district supervisors or staff development**	**Communication vehicle (s)**	**Time frame**
Developmental needs Summary		• Summary of the Growth and Progress in achieving the outcomes outlined in the learning contract. Growth and Progress measured in: • Assessment of knowledge, Attitude, Skills (KAS) in Interpersonal Effectiveness/Engagement • Assessment of KAS family assessment child development Safety Assessment Risk Assessment • Intervention KAS in Strategies for Intervention Decision-making Case tools Case management	*Developmental Needs Summary* written by local staff development and shared among local district staff development supervisor, coach and/or the line supervisor and the training participant	Before entrance into Outcome focused training

Table 8: Suggested Avenues, Elements and Time frames for a Local District, Trainer and Participant Evaluation Protocol for SPECIALIZED training.

Avenue	Elements supplied by trainers	Elements supplied by local district	Communication vehicle (s)	Time frame
Pre training conference		• Demographics • Measured performance on CORE training and OJT • Preparation of individual for training • Performance/training contract specific to Specialized Training • Special Needs of the participant • CORE Developmental Needs Summary	•STARS system • *Developmental Needs Summary* • Trainee Profile	Prior to training
Developmental Needs Summary		Local District Assessment of Readiness Level for Specialized Training • Assessment of Interpersonal Effectiveness • Assessment skills in relationship to families child development Safety concerns Risk Assessment • Intervention skills in relationship to Development of Strategies for Intervention and Case Management	Telephone conference initiated by trainer and with the local staff development supervisor, coach and/or the line supervisor and the training participant. Pre Specialized assessment tools	Prior to training

Avenue	Elements supplied by trainers	Elements supplied by local district	Communication vehicle (s)	Time frame
Post training conference	• Growth or progress in relation to training or learning contract • remaining needs • Assessment: • decision-making quality • use of case tools • red flags • Additional assistance to help trainee through OJT or remediation Post Specialized KAS assessment tools	• Growth or progress in relation to training or learning contract • areas of Specialized where trainee is doing well or not so well • Additional assistance to help trainee through remediation or OJT • How the training went for the participant Post Specialized assessment tools	Telephone conference initiated by trainer and with the local staff development supervisor, coach and/or the line supervisor and the training participant. Post Specialized assessment tools	Within two weeks after training

Developmental Needs Summary Specialized	Developmental Needs Summary written by local district . The evaluation protocol for the SPECIALIZED training will assist local district to determine the ability level of new staff to: • obtain relevant information within the context New York Child Protective Services laws and regulation, and social work oriented practice? • obtain relevant information within evidentiary standards of civil proceedings for familial child maltreatment cases? • make decisions required in relationship to safety, risk, removal, report determinations and general case management?	Before entrance into levels 3 - 5 training

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